

THE ALIEN. By HENRY NORMANBY.

A story of deep human interest, showing once more the terrible conflict that may arise between the natural affections and the duty of a soldier.



THEY stood, with the defiance born of desperation, compatriots all, some of them his friends—even his own flesh and blood, for Cherni was there, and the brother of the girl who loved him, Cherni, with whom he had romped and fought in that very square fifteen years ago.

The square, in those olden days, was a great waste of fields where Noah, Cherni, and a host of other gay children played, a wide waste of variegated fields, brown in spring, green in summer, yellow, like the Virgin's aureole, in autumn, and in the winter white. White was it now, for the hard winter held the land and was driving the starving wretches out of their homes to seek food and raiment, even at the peril of their lives.

Directly the barracks were built, the three of them, his brother Cherni, Sleisher Lieb from Poland, brother of that dark-eyed Loya whom he loved, and Noah himself had very proudly marched into the gloomy and comfortless building as conscripts, for the uniform was a brave sight, and surely it is a fine thing to be called to defend the Fatherland!

It was only theoretically fine, however, for the martial school was a hard and bitter one, and the brutality of their officers was such that Sleisher Lieb deserted, was taken, and put to death. At the earliest possible moment Cherni gravely returned to his village, to the peaceful plough and harrow. Noah, grown austere and stubborn, disdained the quiet avocation of the labourer, and continued to sweat under the oppression of authority.

The last fifteen years had gone by even as all other years, and had brought no amelioration to the grievous common lot. Men had toiled and died, women had wept and died also, everyone had lost heart and faith and hope, until at length there was nothing more to lose, for everything was lost. A further imposition of taxes, a devastating blight in the fields, a more severe winter than usual, a great epidemic outbreak, and lo! men's hands were raised against each other and the white roads ran red.

Thus it was that Noah Kosanak stood shoulder to shoulder with his fellows in the public square, while in front of them a crowd of turbulent compatriots raged and chafed. They were incensed at the presence of the troops, and from the mob broke menacing cries, while every few minutes stones were thrown, notwithstanding the exhortations of their leader, who

constantly harangued them, urging them to peace. It was a scene of open rebellion, and the man who, unarmed and unaided, stood before the seditious peasants while exhorting them to pacific measures, was the farmer Cherni Kosanak; and one of the soldiers who stood with him, armed and under the protection of the soldiers, was his brother. These two were as David and Jonathan.

Suddenly from the crowd of insurgents came a man who espied her son amongst the soldiery. Crying his name, he strove to make her way to him, to be thrust back by the captain; again she attempted to get past, imploring her captives to throw down his arms and not to fire upon his own kindred; the captain silenced her prayer by felling her to the ground with his fist. At sight of this monstrous deed a great cry went up, a cry arising not from the momentary exasperation of the moment, but from a mighty voice, deep with the despairing agony of many centuries.

With the cry the crowd swept forward, and the captain ordered his men to fire. All, with the exception of Noah Kosanak, obeyed, but none of the insurgents fell. Seeing the captain with his rifle at rest, the captain rode up to him and reproaching him by a foul name. Noah stood without speaking, his eyes fixed on his brother.

"Fire, you son of a thief!" cried the captain, striking him a blow in the mouth. Unhesitatingly Noah Kosanak obeyed.

For a second or two the dead captain swayed in the air, then he fell, watching in perfect silence, and as the body struck the ground a cheer rose into the air. Then a great awe fell upon them, and of the reckoning to be paid. There was no further need of words; bowed heads they went sorrowfully away to their homes. The barracks fared a small body of soldiers bearing with them the bound and one free.

That night a woman prayed, and to a captive came a messenger, a gaoler, whose friends and brothers also were starved and oppressed, drew back the heavy bolts, relieved him of his fetters, and he went in peace.

Out into the frost-fettered night stepped Noah Kosanak, allowed him to go unchallenged, and once more he passed the silent square, fresh from its red baptism. His step rang on the frozen ground, and from house and hut and cabin men came forth, and without comment let him go his way. In the morning he changed his uniform for the less noticeable dress of a peasant, and refused the money which his brother pressed upon him.

They stood at the door, beneath the steel-blue, starry sky, silver flashing stars, knowing well that never more would they meet in this world. Every friendship and every love and every truth had its bitter end, for the loves of earth shall change and pass away like the memory of an idle dream.

"Where will you go, my brother?" asked Cherni Kosanak, answered him: "I go to that great country where men are free."

They embraced each other as men embrace when the final parting is to be made, and without further speech the fugitive turned to the west and his brother watched him fade into the night.

Day, serene and fair and strenuous, broke upon him as he walked, and the laggard sun lit his cheek as he turned to gaze down from a hillside upon the long and lonely road he had traversed through the dark. Steadily he tramped on, taking brief rests by the wayside, breaking his long fasts with haste and avoiding most men lest he fell into the hands of spies; yet no man sought to betray him, no man refused him shelter, no man denied him food. Many brought respite to his weariness by carrying him in the wagons that went his way. He was not questioned, but to all he truly told his story, and all kept faith with him.

As comrades marched Fortitude and Patience, and a great resolve. These faltered not nor fell weary, neither did they ever forsake him; and in this wise, after many days and much hardship and suffering, he came unto the frontier.

Nature, contemplating some supreme effort, seems at times to pause to take breath. We see it in the oppressive silence and stillness preceding storms. Such a stillness, heavy and of evil portent, brooded over the earth as the wanderer drew near to the confines of his country; then suddenly, as at the word of command, out of the North, implacable and resistless, issued the wind. Out of the North it came, roaring over the frozen seas and iron-bound shores, bringing in its wide-stretched arms destruction and death. From the unknown ends of the earth, sweeping across the plains, over the wide Siberian wastes, over the grey hills and through green valleys, came with a mighty thunder the Arctic storm.

Snow came with it, thick, blinding, and confusing, sweeping and eddying in dense whirling wreaths, blackening the sky, blotting out roads and landmarks; making the whole earth a white, mysterious wonder.

At daybreak the snow ceased to fall; the intense cold hardened into marble that which lay on the land, and the obliterated road passed briskly beneath his feet as he dreamed of the coming peace at his journey's end.

A woman toiling at the roadside some miles beyond a township rose to greet him and answer his questions. Just beyond, on the other side of the valley, were the guards, a toll-bar being across the road, so that none could pass without examination and permission. There was no other road, she said, none but that. Her offer of shelter he declined, lest he, being taken, should bring ruin upon his benefactress, and, having appeased his hunger, commended her to the care of the Saints and set out upon the last stage of his perilous journey.

Within sight of the hut occupied by the guards the fugitive halted, and, finding by experience that there was indeed no other way, decided to hide until nightfall and then attempt to get through. He lay beneath a stunted hedge prone on the hard snow, watching the hut with never-wearying eyes, and at length, so propitious were the Fates, he saw the dreaded sentinels emerge and rapidly disappear in the gathering darkness.

Leaping to his feet, the weary man hastened on so that he might pass before the guard returned. He glanced hurriedly about him as he

approached the toll-gate, fearing the guard might turn, and shoot him down ; but the menace to his peace had van minute more he had reached the hut, and was just about t a second sentinel appeared leaning against the angle of t moment the horror-stricken man thought of flight, but dis knowing well that he would be seen and instantly challeng

Possibly the guard might sympathise with him in his if not, and at the worst, he could die by his own hand, fo mined not to be taken back to execution.

The sentinel leaned easily against the wall, his rifle his side, in his mouth a pipe. Noah Kosanak drew ne prayer to the Saints. The guard neither turned nor i when the fugitive advanced and stood before him. Easily he leaned, so easily that it gave him no discomfort, so ea no wish to move ; his hands lay folded over the barrel pipe had gone out, but he did not notice it. Alone he st and still and dead.

Noah Kosanak, gazing upon this sad sentinel, forgot The man who did not challenge him was frozen stiff and : were frozen to the barrel of his rifle ; his pipe was frozen feet were frozen into the hard snow, his wide-open eyes clear ice, and he gazed steadily out over the waste of white

Through that long and bitter night he had kept his unto the end, and at the relief had wandered away throug wilderness, to be himself challenged at the outposts of Ete

That picture of sublime fidelity moved the outcast to sion ; he saluted the dead soldier with the profoundest : mended his soul to God. Making the sign of the Cross ove clay, he hurried through the toll-gate and made his way shrouded hill.

Thereafter his way lay sweetlier, and for weeks journeyed to the North and West. Birds sang to him : sun, sang of that free land where he might work with l and spirit jocund as the day. The airs were warmer, the and the ground was soft beneath his feet. Here now w men spoke strangely, singing their words with long an nouncement. They also gave him of their store and gra his way. Rumour reached him of grievous happenings which he came, of battle and fire and slaughter, of famin tyranny and oppression. So, sad at heart, he journeyed o accepting help of any man without rendering him some s sometimes working in the fields of grain, in vineyards or having earned sufficient to repay his benefactor, he agai far-off country where men are free.

In the great cities he met many who spoke his own t did it sound so sweet as then. These took him by the har brother, but though they pressed money on him, he would since he might render them no service in recompense.

As he came unto the port wherefrom he was to set sail, other wanderers joined him, and together they journeyed, united in the brotherhood of misfortune. These showed him the way and helped him as they help each other who seek a common end. No man sought to better himself at the expense of his neighbour; they were softened by sorrow and by persecution made kind; all they asked was leave to live, and that surely is the indubitable right of us all.

Noah Kosanak was filled with wonder when he came in sight of the sea; its vastness awed him, its beauty amazed him, and the soft music of its murmuring brought peace to his troubled soul. Nevertheless, as the ship steamed out into the blue waste of waters he turned his face towards the land and breathed a prayer for the welfare of his kindred.

When the sun rose again the journey had come to an end, and the great vessel lay quietly along the quay. Not yet, however, could the wayfarers land; they must be examined and interrogated. All who were destitute, save only political refugees, would be sent back to their own country, but those possessed of a certain small sum of money could pass without further hindrance.

One by one they were taken before the examining officer and questioned, and one by one they stepped down the gangway and disappeared. One man only, being without means, was refused permission to land—his name, Noah Kosanak. Asked his reasons for leaving his home and country, and why he should be permitted to be a burden to those he came amongst, the alien answered, telling the story herein set forth. He told it simply, as a brave man speaking the truth.

"Your brother was amongst the crowd?" asked the officer.

"Sir, they were all my brothers."

"Even so, and we are likewise—you may pass."

Without haste he turned away to join the loiterers on the quay, and a strange and sweet thing happened. He was recalled and again questioned.

"Know you a woman, Loya Lieb by name?"

"I know her well," he answered wonderingly.

"Is this she?" asked the officer, and the light of his dark days shone on him.

With awe and amazement they listened to the story of her love. She had left her home and kindred and had followed her hapless lover unceasingly throughout his terrible journey; nothing had discouraged nor deterred her; wanting food she had not suffered hunger, and without water she had never been athirst. A stranger to weariness and unknown to sorrow, she had followed him through all those weeks and months. Wild beasts had not harmed her, neither had anyone pursued her to her hurt. Fearing that he might insist on returning with her, or that her presence would hamper him and increase his peril, she had never made her presence known. She asked neither pity nor charity, but merely that she might be allowed to go to him.

Noah Kosanak stepped forward and kissed her on the lips, the gates of his fairest vision opened wide, and through them they passed into that great country where men are free.